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Rudi Matthee



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- ¹ Orientalism, this article asserts, has forgotten its origins. These are not to be found in the works of much-vaunted Orientalists such as Anquetil-Duperron and Sir William Jones, but in the contributions of Persianate scholars who assisted and guided and in some cases preceded them. Pointing the finger at scholars ranging from Raymond Schwab to Edward Said, the author criticizes the conventional notion that Asians lacked the curiosity of Europeans in the study of languages and religions, and attributes such observations to the « binary assumption of 'Oriental silence' and 'Western writing' », and to a deliberate choice designed to discipline the Orient and to legitimize the Western claim to objective knowledge. He makes a valiant effort to retrace the contributions of Persianate scholars to the education of 'pioneering' Orientalists, but does not get much beyond the truism that early Orientalism was a cooperative venture. All scholars need native informants and Jones *et al.* never concealed their debt to indigenous scholars and pundits. Most importantly, neither this nor the fact that Indo-Persian scholars were busy translating texts from one Islamic language to another undermines the thesis that Europeans vastly outdid their Muslim and Hindu counterparts in curiosity about other cultures. Least of all does it demonstrate the existence of « Occidentalism ». Ironically, the author himself offers examples that undermine his own theses, such as the sighs by Sheriff Khan, Sir John Malcolm's *mehmandar*, that his office was very fatiguing because the ambassador had « no love of quiet », or Anquetil-Duperron's need to resort to bribery in order to elicit information that his secretive Indian interlocutors were unwilling to share with him.

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Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

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